

TRADITIONAL HOME.

# RENOVATION STYLE

SUMMER 1997

**glorious**  
kitchen  
ideas

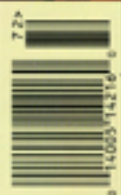
discover beauty in detail

**Ranch Redo**

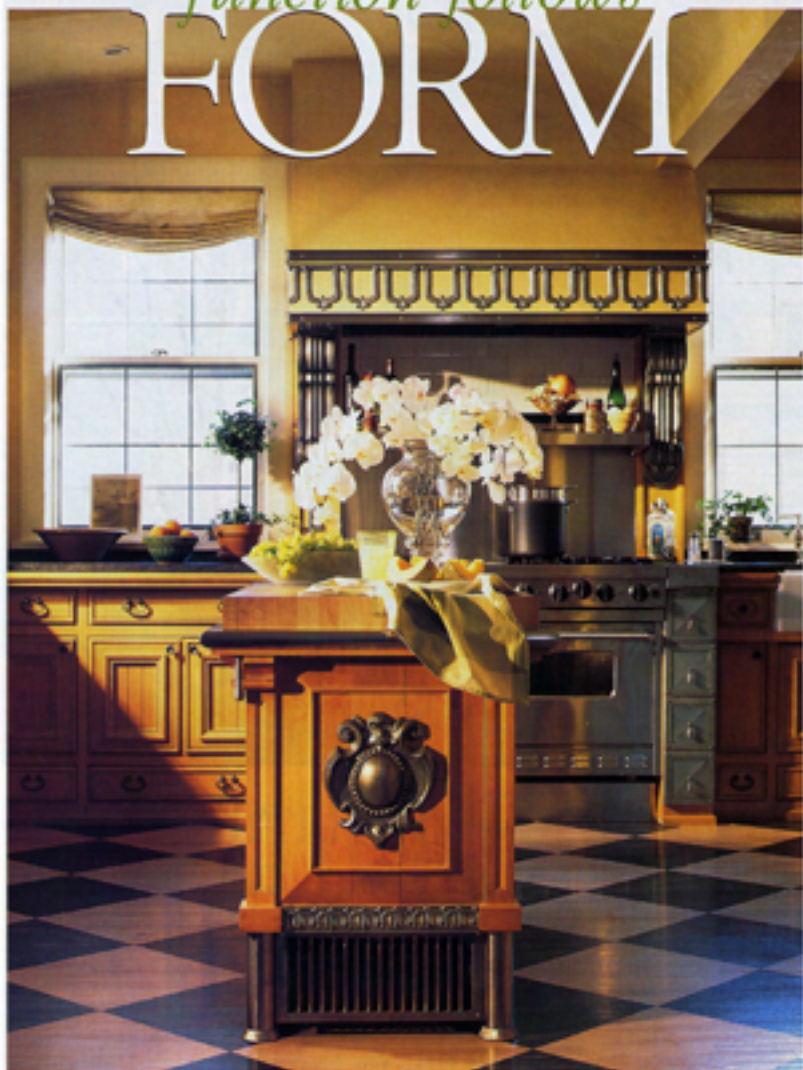
**Airy sunrooms**

**Vintage Stoves**

**Front-porch charms: restore, repair, reinvent**



*function follows*  
**FORM**



With bold defiance and splendid country French style, this kitchen renovation reverses an almost sacred principle of modern architecture: function first.

BY CANDACE ORD MARROE PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENIFER JORDAN



Contemporary in function, this renovated kitchen has a moody, turn-of-the-century appeal.

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etropolitan homeowner Paul Reyels knew exactly how ironic, even subversive, the kitchen he had in mind was—a room in which function follows form. As a former architecture student, Paul knew that for generations, modern design had almost slavishly adhered to the creed of “form follows function.” Still, he was determined to stay his unorthodox course.

Architects Martha Yunker and Marc Aismus couldn't have been happier. The Reyels' stately, French-style home deserved a kitchen worthy of its 1929 heritage—not one that relegated appearances to the back burner, not even for the sake of gourmet cooking.

## ALTHOUGH AESTHETICS

“Our house has distinctive architecture, with a lot of detailing and really lovely spaces,” says Paul's wife Mary. “We didn't want a nineties kitchen in an old house.” More than that, they “wanted a kitchen that kept pace with the rest of the house,” adds Yunker.

But putting aesthetics first didn't mean compromising function or convenience. The owners still had practical needs. “Our two children are six and eight, so we also wanted a kitchen that could take a lot of wear and tear,” Mary explains. In the skillful hands of the architects and interior designer Carol Belt, utilitarian considerations are addressed in the cosmetics, so that form and function



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT:

A pressed-in frieze and brackets make even a stove hood a decorative feature. • Stainless steel and pressed-in work together to embellish the island. • The kitchen's two sinks each have drainboards cut into the green granite countertop. • Unique metal drawers outfitted with special hardware flank the range.



## COME FIRST, FUNCTION IS NEVER COMPROMISED.

work in tandem, not at odds. Decisions for the walls, floor, countertops, and even the cabinetry finish all fit the visual goal, while also being family-friendly. "The wall color is actually in the plaster, for example, instead of painted on, so that walls take spills," Mary illustrates.

Before the renovation could begin, the existing kitchen (a '70s update with yellow countertops and a fluorescent-dropped ceiling) and butler's pantry had to go. "We took it down to the studs," says Yanker of the newly merged space. "Mary's idea was that the new kitchen look like it had always been there," says Belt. "We wanted a lovely European country look, quite simple."

To achieve that aged appearance, standard cabinetry wouldn't do. Instead, the architects designed maple cabinets like front-facing furniture, then applied a light white-wash for a vintage effect that's also low maintenance. "We wanted old-style cabinets, elaborate with unique hardware and hinges," says Yanker. "They aren't all the same. The variation gives the room richness of detail."

To further the furniture feel, wall cabinets aren't hung, but rest on counters. Lower cabinets extend "to the floor, so there's no toe space and they look more like chests," says Mary. "The doors are two inches thick in places, and on some, there's leaded glass to mimic the rest of the house."



**Before**



**After: 18x17 kitchen**

**TOP LEFT:** Kitchen cabinets—maple, with a whitewash in the crevices—are designed as free-standing furniture. Setting wall cabinets on the counter and eliminating toe space at the base asserts the idea of furniture rather than a built-in.

**BOTTOM LEFT:** A radiator at the room's center is hidden by the metal grate at the island's base.

**MIDDLE:** Leaded-glass on the hutch's doors mimic that found elsewhere in the house.





Martha Yunker  
& Marc Armus

Pressed tin also adds decorative detailing, but in the "classical sense that industrial materials were used at the turn of the century," says Armus. As a frieze and brackets, tin trims the range hood, and accents other areas including the island, which becomes a richly ornamented piece of furniture with its tin medallions. Stainless-steel appliances and edging on the island's butcher-block top, as well as a steel radiator grate at its base, complement the tin.

Belt kept window treatments minimal with Roman shades, allowing the room's only pattern statement to be made in the green-and-white checkerboard of the stained oak floor. Green matte granite countertops were chosen "for their depth of color, to anchor the pale cabinets' honeyed finish," says Belt. Selected for its beauty, granite offers forgiving functions: resisting stains and abrasions.

Similarly, her decision to mix color into the plaster rather than to paint over it was for aesthetics, but offered the bonus of practicality. The smoky gold color has an irregular quality, changing where the plaster was troweled more, so it doesn't feel as controlled and perfect as a faux finish might. Unlike paint, it has the depth of a natural material and has a matte appearance, which means that chips are less likely to show.

Structural changes included opening up the kitchen to enlarge it and visually connect it to the family room's dining space (for restrictions precluded building an addition) and removing the dropped ceiling to restore its original height—but this time adding a dramatic arch.

Behind the sink, windows moved from the family room exactly match those already present. "Windows face south and east, so there are streams of sunlight coming in during the day," says Yunker. "For night, we used low-voltage, tiny downlights to flood surfaces, and uplights to throw light across the ceiling."

True to Paul's request that function follow form, the kitchen "doesn't look like a work space," says Yunker. "We just wanted to delight your eye with lots and lots of detail, so you're always seeing something new." □

## Checkerboard past

A distressed, two-toned paint or stain application in a classic checkerboard pattern imparts an old-style European look to any room; it's an easy project to do yourself.

- **To re-create the floor treatment in the Reyelts' kitchen,** purchase dark green (almost a charcoal) and creamy antique white paints or highly pigmented stains. If using paint, first thin it with water for greater translucence.
- **Sand off the old finish.** Thoroughly remove sanding dust with a vacuum.
- **Decide on a checkerboard width.** The Reyelts' design is larger than average tile size—about 18 inches. Mask off the design with painter's tape for the first color, laying tape around the perimeter of each square that's to be colored. Heighten visual interest by laying the grid on the diagonal.
- **Paint on the first color,** let it partially dry, then rub off some color with steel wool. "We wanted it to look as though feet had scuffed off the paint over the years," says interior designer Carol Belt.
- **Allow the first coat to dry,** then repeat the taping, painting or staining, and rubbing for the second color blocks in the grid. Let dry.
- **Protect the design** with at least two coats of polyurethane, following the label directions.

**RENOVATOR'S TIP:** To provide visual connection throughout the room, rub some of the creamy whitewash into cabinet crevices.



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FOR INFORMATION, SEE THE BUYING GUIDE ON PAGE 124.